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ABSTRACT

A distinction between "conservation" and "innovation" in language instruction emphasizes the notion of necessary interplay between the two phenomena in the area of curriculum development. Remarks addressed to junior college personnel reject direct correspondences between "conservation" and "conservatism," and "innovation" and "radicalism." Four proposals for the development of innovative programs to improve student motivation are offered. They include: (1) continuing and terminal courses, (2) the "Hors d'Oeuvre Approach" (a variation of the introductory course), (3) diversification of content, and (4) variation in pacing learning rates. (RL)

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CONSERVATION AND INNOVATION

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In "Precaution", Robert Frost has said:

I never dared be radical when young
For fear it would make me conservative when old.[1]

At first reading I found this rather startling but on reflexion, it linked in my mind with a recent statement of Günther Grass: "I think there are many realities, and all these realities can exist at the same time."[2] Radicals and conservatives converge in believing that they have the answer, that there is one right approach to a question, whereas effective foreign-language teaching in diverse institutions at the present time must accept the reality of many answers, to be selected according to the diversity of need and circumstance. In this article, then, I am not speaking of conservatism or radicalism, but of the interplay in any evolving situation between conservation and innovation.

We at the University of Illinois at Urbana have just won what we see as a significant victory[3]: to conserve something we believe to be a valuable part of our students' educational experience.[4] Conservation is not merely clinging blindly to the old and the established because it is the known and the secure. Conservation means recognizing that something has value and working

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actively for its survival. For anything to survive it must be able to respond to new circumstances and new demands. Innovation, then, is essential to conservation if that which we believe to be of value is not to become a mere museum piece, retained for reasons of prestige although no longer serving a useful purpose in its changed setting.

What, then, are we conserving? Why did we at the University of Illinois at Urbana work so hard to preserve foreign-language study as an essential element in liberal education? As educators, we wished to conserve for all liberally-educated students the opportunity to get outside of their own language, to get outside of the thought-molds of their native culture, to get outside of their own value systems, if only momentarily, in order to see their own ways of thinking and expressing themselves, their own conceptions of the normal and the obvious, their own responses to situations and ideas and people from a different perspective.

This is something which we feel to be worth conserving in the education of the individual, because it develops a flexibility of thinking which is becoming more and more essential for all as we are challenged daily by the continually evolving ideas, values, and demands of a fast-changing society.[5] Broadening our perspective from individual to societal needs, and bringing its implications nearer home, we may through this effect on individuals contribute to the breaking down of that "provincialism and parochialism which threaten a nation which feels psychologi-

cally isolated from its neighbors,"[6] and which, as a result, may tend to turn in on itself instead of facing boldly the challenges of new concepts and new relationships.

Conservation, then, refers to the values of foreign-language study, innovation to their realization in a new setting in a new decade, and you in the junior and community colleges are right in the midst of this new opportunity.

If students of today with their yearning to roam, physically and spiritually, beyond national boundaries and their questioning of traditional values do not enjoy learning a foreign language, then (to parallel Shakespeare):

> "The fault, dear [friends], is not in our [subject],
> But in ourselves that we are underlings".[7]

An unadulterated diet of frankly preliminary learnings for persons who will never reach the consummatory stage is indigestible and unpalatable--yet, this is what many of our students are served and served exclusively. In two-year colleges, this means what is fundamentally a transfer program for non-transfers, or at least non majors.[8] We talk glibly about our objectives and our goals, but in our step-by-step program for foreign-language mastery these goals are only dimly perceived as attainable, even after several arduous semesters of tedious grind. Student motivation, whose apparent lac we often deplore, is stimulated and channeled, not by the setting out of reasonable and relevant objectives which salve the instructor's conscience, but by student perception of the attainment and attainability of those objectives.[9]

It is here that the junior and community colleges can, and should, lead the way. A two-year college is not an elitist

institution drawing on the top ten percent of the high school graduating class. It is not an established institution sunk deep in ivy and centuries of habit. It is a new concept with a new clientele and should be pulsating with new life. As foreign-language teachers we may consider that this new clientele needs this age-old experience as much as, and perhaps more than, the traditional college population. We will wish to conserve the essence of the language-learning experience in this new institution. This does not mean that we have to, or can necessarily, conserve the forms, the institutionalized modes, of initiating students into this experience. Junior and community college instructos must innovate: they must experiment in renewing the forms while retaining the essence. Content, organization of learning experiences, modality of learning, pace, and gauging of progress should all be reexamined in order to make accessible to all kinds of students this unique, educational experience of encounter with another way of thought and expression.

Such innovation requires understanding, imagination, and courage.

--Understanding (perceptiveness): to see what the student needs, not in a utilitarian sense, but in a human sense.

--Imagination: thinking beyond the confines of past and present experience; assessing, in relation to the needs of the students, possibilities which have never been tried.

--Courage: to know the students as they are, to recognize what must be provided for them and to accept them as full partners in their own educational experience; courage to do

what has not been done before and is not being done elsewhere; courage to accept the mistakes you have made and learn from them; courage to withstand the criticism of others who remain safely on well-trodden paths.

The junior and community colleges are, for the most part, young. Let them also be adventurous. Imagination and courage come more easily to the young.

At this conference let us drop our masks with each other and share freely, allowing imagination and insight to flow from one to another, so that we may develop new patterns and new attitudes appropriate to our new situation. What matter if we are called <u>dreamers</u>! All the great innovators have been dreamers. We need the courage to set down our convictions, to work them through realistically, and to return to our colleges ready to insist on our right to experiment rationally, with the equanimity to face criticism, indifference, and discouragement as we try to implement our ideas. Of course, we will make mistakes; of course, some of our ideas will not work, but all progress comes through experimentation. Each failure provides as much information as a success when we function as a sharing, mutually comprehensive community.

<u>PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS</u>

Here without wishing to direct your thinking into preselected channels, I would like to present several concepts of curriculum planning which are worth careful consideration: Continuing and Terminal Courses; The Hors d'Oeuvre Approach; Diversification of Content; Variation in Pacing.

Continuing and Terminal Courses.[10]

With a diverse student population we must study carefully the questions: --Who is going where?

--What does he want and need?

Our traditional foreign-language courses at college level have been continuing courses in the sense that they have been designed with the mastery required of the future major in mind. Setting the foundation with care, building on it methodically and soberly, they have moved steadily toward the objective of a complete and fully equipped edifice. At any stage on the way the edifice is incomplete, unfunctional, only minimally useable in a makeshift fashion. If construction ceases at an early stage, the embryonic edifice deteriorates and finally crumbles to dust. So it is with a continuing course--those who go on to the stage of mastery are well equipped, solidly grounded, able to function in the language; those who drop out after the foundations are laid soon forget, finding no use for the small accumulation of knowledge and skill which it took a great deal of time and energy to acquire.

There is, and always will be, a place for the continuing course--for those who want and need it. We have many ideas for the design and operation of such courses. But for the others, for those who stay with us a short while, who come to see what we have to offer as our contribution to a liberal education? Can we not do better for them?

Here the concept of the terminal course can help us. A terminal course sets a goal related to the interests and needs

of the students in that course and achieves that goal, no matter how long or short the course may be. The goals, then, vary. Some take longer to achieve than others, but this is known to and accepted by the students who undertake the course. Is the student to remain with us only one semester? Then, instead of deploring this fact and force-feeding him the usual introductory diet, we design a course which will give him a complete experience during that semester. Here, the hors d'oeuvre approach can be helpful. Is he more likely to remain for four semesters? Then we design a course in which he will have acquired something he can perceive as an achievement in those four semesters. Perhaps he can understand films or broadcasts, or take part in general conversation at an uncomplicated level? Maybe he can read magazines and newspapers or articles in a specialized field but can do no more than find his way about orally. At least he will not go away with only preliminary learnings for more advanced courses he will never take.

Once the concept of a distinction between continuing and terminal courses is accepted, all our planning is affected. We can then consider the advantages of a terminal-type first semester course which will allow some to retire gracefully from the field, having tasted to see whether foreign-language study interests them, but which will motivate others to continue because new perspectives have opened up to them which they are anxious to explore.

I shall call this the Hors d'Oeuvre course, knowing full well that this very title will cause some to dismiss it as a

frivolity which cannot be taken seriously. Such an attitude springs from a rather widespread, often subconscious, feeling that really educative activities cannot possibly be, or at least ought not to be, enjoyable. This being an attitude we should combat, let us keep the term for the present. Dictionaries sometimes translate or explain the word hors d'oeuvre as "little appetizers," their function being to arouse our appetite for more substantial food. One of our problems in the foreign-language field is the early dropout rate, which is uncomfortably high after one or two semesters in institutions where foreign-language study is purely elective. Under the present system, what do these dropouts gain, in an educational sense, after one semester?

With the hors d'oeuvre approach, the first semester would be designed to give each student an insight into the nature of the subject, some practical experience of the language and the culture of the speakers of that language, and a feeling for the fundamental differences between languages. It would be an interesting course in itself, exciting some to continue, illuminating all on the nature of the discipline, and making a valuable, if small, contribution to the educational experience of each student. As an approach it is worth considering seriously.

Why should our foreign-language menu be stodgy and unattractive? Is there any serious reason why students should not thoroughly enjoy their introduction to a language, so that they anticipate their next course with genuine pleasure?

We all know that motivation is necessary to carry students through the inevitably solid, and sometimes tedious, learning necessary for acquiring any lasting control of a language. If the hors d'oeuvre approach arouses in some a real desire to learn the language more fully, it will have made an important contribution to the program. And then, if those who go no further retain in later life favorable attitudes toward the whole language-learning enterprise, this in itself will return dividends in a gradually improving community attitude toward the foreign-language program at the college.

Beyond the introductory course, our objective should be a diversified offering. We are continually being told this is the age of pluralism. What appeared from a psychological distance to be a monolithic society has proved on closer examination to be a great diversity of cultures, sub-cultures, groups, subgroups, and individuals--each with his own goals, aspirations, and interests. The foreign-language programs of the present and the future must reflect this diversity.

In the foreign-language field we are very fortunate: language is a vehicle of expression, not an end in itself. A multiplicity of possibilities therefore opens before us. Language which is being used purposefully will be learned. We have, then, a multiplicity of possible content and a multiplicity of possible activities from which to choose. Suitable approaches and pace of learning can be as varied as the personalities and temperaments of our students.[11] Language can be learned through conversation, through reading, through singing, through listening, from radio, film, or drama, through translation, through writing, by library research, by independent

study, in group activities, social activities, or community action. A diversity of possible courses awaits the attention of those who with imagination, energy, and confidence are willing to experiment with new structures and a new content. Where better to begin than in the junior and community colleges where the spirit of innovation is evident in the very fact of their existence?

NOTES

1. Robert Frost, "Precaution." Complete Poems of Robert Frost. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1948.
2. J. Robert Moskin, Interview with Günther Grass, "Günther Grass and the Murderer at the Desk," Intellectual Digest (April, 1972), p.20.
3. On March 22, 1972, the day the Illinois Conference began, the faculty of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign voted by a two-thirds majority to retain the graduation and entrance requirements in foreign language of the College (four semesters of college or four years of high school study). See Richard T. Scanlan, "The Vote for the Foreign Language Requirement: Strategy Notes," pp. 000 of this book.
4. In this case conservation with innovation. See Action Reports by J. McGlathery, R. Figge, and W. Rivers.
5. The problems of adapting to new attitudes among youth and rapid change in society are discussed at length in "Foreign Languages in a Time of Change" in Wilga M. Rivers, Speaking in Many Tongues: Essays in Foreign-Language Teaching (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1972).
6. Quoted from "Basic Information on the FL Requirement" issued by the Scanlan Committee, University of Illinois at Urbana, 1972.
7. W. Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, I.ii, with adaptations.

8. Sister Marie Celeste's survey shows that among students in two-year college foreign-language programs in Illinois in 1971-2, only 43 could be considered future foreign-language majors (p. 000 of this book).

9. The complex question of student motivation is discussed in depth in Wilga M. Rivers, "Motivating through Classroom Techniques," in Speaking in Many Tongues (1972). and in Chapter 9 of the Psychologist and the Foreign-Language Teacher (Chicago, 1964) by the same author.

10. Continuing and terminal courses are discussed (with more elaboration of content) as Stage One and Stage Two programs in Wilga M. Rivers, "Foreign Languages in a Time of Change" in Speaking in Many Tongues (1972).

11. A program diversified in content and pace is described in my Action Report, "Diversification of the Elementary and Intermediate Language Courses," pp. 000 of this book. Most colleges would not have the possibility or the need for such an extensive program, but college instructors may gain ideas from it for adaptation to their own situation.